

FORT INDIANTOWN GAP

Hunters criticize proposed land swap

Deal would provide
safety buffer zone
for base, officials say

BY AL WINN

Of Our Lebanon Bureau

FORT INDIANTOWN GAP • For the Pennsylvania National Guard, a proposed land swap with the Pennsylvania Game Commission and Harrisburg Water Authority is part of a fight to keep the Fort Indiantown Gap military reservation open and viable as a training base.

But for some area hunters and outdoorsmen, the proposal that would turn 1,800 acres of game lands on the north side of Second Mountain over to the National Guard would be an incursion on treasured landscape.

"This land is sacred to a lot of people," said Clyde Herr, of Union Twp., at a public meeting at Fort Indiantown Gap last night. About 40 people attended to ask questions and voice concerns.

The proposed three-way deal would involve the National Guard buying 1,800 acres of DeHart Reservoir watershed from the Harrisburg Water Authority and turning it over to the Game Commission. In turn, the commission would give up a six-mile strip of land along the north

GAP: Hunters take aim at game-lands swap

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side of Second Mountain between Cold Spring Road and the Middle Paxton Twp. line. A bit more than half the land would be in Dauphin County.

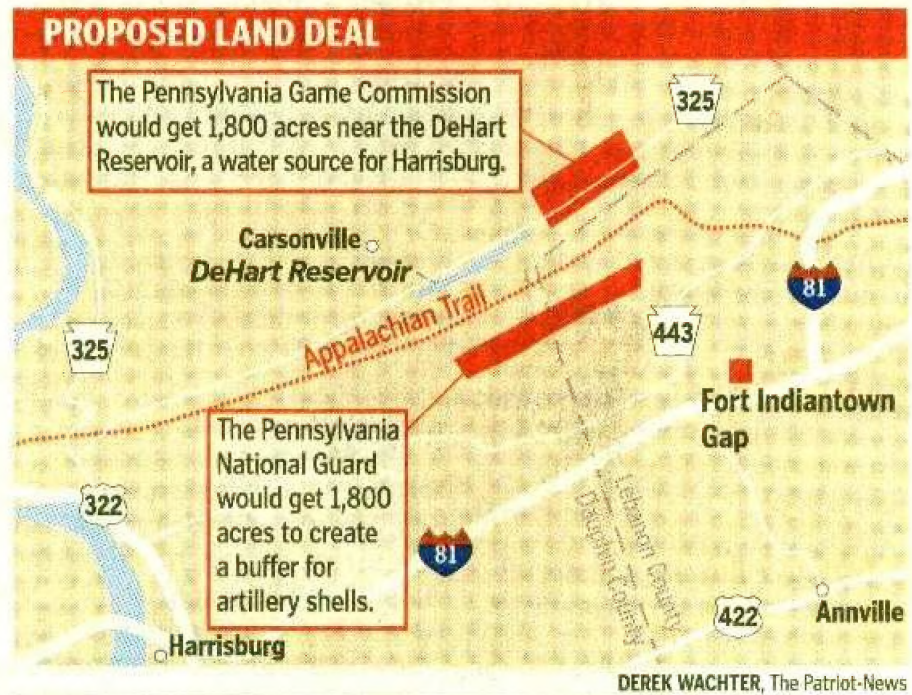
National Guard officials said they need the land for a safety buffer for expanding firing ranges on the south side of Second Mountain. Tanks and artillery using the ranges shoot parallel to the ridge, but there is a chance of shells ricocheting over the mountain, they said.

Guard officials said they are trying to cram as many training activities as possible onto the 17,000-acre base to keep it viable. Fort Indiantown Gap, Lebanon County's largest employer, came close to closing after a Base Realignment and Closing Commission decided the U.S. Army would pull out of the facility.

"The future didn't look so good in 1995," said Guard spokesman Lt. Col. Chris Cleaver.

The buffer zone the Guard wants would extend down the north slope of Second Mountain to just short of Stony Creek. The land would not change under National Guard ownership, officials said. "The slope of second mountain today is the way it will be in the future," Cleaver said.

Guard officials said they would allow hunters and others access in the same way they allow access to other Gap land. But as with other



National Guard land, it could be closed to the public to accommodate training activities, some hunters pointed out.

The western portion of the buffer zone might never be closed, base commander Col. Ray Hulings said. But the eastern portion, nearest Cold Spring Road, could be closed as much as half the time, Cleaver said. An effort would be made to keep it open during big-game hunting seasons.

The land the Guard wants would not include Stony Creek, the nearby rail trail, or the historic ruins at Cold Spring. Some who could accept that the current proposal probably wouldn't affect recreational possibilities in the game lands worried the Guard might not stop with this ac-

quisition.

"How long is it going to be before tanks come into the [Stony Creek] valley?" Dennis Ibberson asked.

In the other part of the three-way deal, the land the Game Commission would get from Harrisburg could link Game Lands 211 and 210, thereby creating the largest game-lands area in the state, Game Commission officials have said.

Guard officials said the proposal is still in its early stages, and none of the three entities has approved the deal.

"We're going to keep right on pushing for new programs," Cleaver said.

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